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Soviets Admit Violation of SALT Accord

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The Soviet Union violated a treaty for converting its nuclear arsenal under the 1972 SALT I agreement, which established limits on the number of strategic nuclear weapons, the State Department spokesman said.

The first acknowledged violation of a portion of the accord for carrying out the original U.S.-Soviet nuclear accord is likely to have an impact on the presidential election campaign. Republican candidate Ronald Reagan frequently has attacked the accord.

So close to the potential political implications of the new disclosure, the Ford administration stressed yesterday that President Ford "last winter" instructed U.S. officials to raise the matter as "a serious issue."

But, a State Department spokesman said, "The Soviets officially informed us prior to our raising the issue that they had not met the schedule and gave us detailed information concerning our own intelligence."

The violation was first disclosed publicly by Aviation Week and Space Technology last week.

Officials said yesterday that the Soviet Union agreed, at American request in early April, to hold up further sea trials of their latest submarines.

These submarines, known in the United States as Delta II class, are believed to carry 16 missile launchers with a firing range of more than 4,000 nautical miles.

Under the complex conversion formula established for the five-year limitation on offensive nuclear weapons signed in 1972 and amplified in 1974, older missiles must be dismantled as an expansion of the Soviet nuclear submarine fleet takes place.

The Soviet Union was limited to 400 missile launchers and 16 nuclear-powered submarines. It was permitted 1000 or more submarine missiles and launchers for out-of-the-water or sea-launched missiles.

but not made public, specified that the dismantling for these launches had to be completed within a four-month period after the start of sea trials of replacement submarines, U.S. officials said.

Last December, officials said, U.S. intelligence found that the Soviet Union had 747 missiles on subs, and the Soviet Union was launching sea trials of four Delta II class subs.

Previously, on Dec. 9, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger labeled as "total falsehood" charges by retired Adm. Elmo Zumwalt, former chief of naval operations, that Kissinger had withheld information from President Ford about earlier violations of the strategic arms limitation talks (SALT) accord.

At that time, Kissinger said the Soviet Union had taken advantage of ambiguities in the accord but had committed no actual violations.

Under terms agreed to in the U.S.-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission, to expand its submarine fleet the Soviet Union was obliged to dismantle 51 older missiles.

But when that commission met March 25, U.S. officials said, the Soviet Union had not completely dismantled 49 of the 51 sites for older SS7 and SS8 missiles.

In "early April," an administration official said yesterday, the United States made its formal protest.

The Soviet reply was said to be that it had put all 51 missiles out of operation, but due to bad weather and "technical difficulties" had been unable to completely dismantle the sites. It agreed to delay the Delta II class sub deployments.

State Department spokesman Fred Z. Brown said U.S. intelligence now "indicates that the Soviets are moving rapidly to complete the dismantling process."

Brown said, "We see it as a violation of the scheduling of the implementation" of the accord.